

**Stafford County Public Schools  
Special Education Advisory Committee**

**2005 / 2006 ANNUAL REPORT  
To the School Board**

Magisterial Members:

Brian Alden - Garrisonville **Chairman**  
Tom Henion - Hartwood **Vice-Chairman**  
Teresa O'Meara - Rockhill District  
Mark Howard - Falmouth  
Thomas Quintero – George Washington District  
Vacant - Aquia District  
Vacant - Griffis-Widewater District

At Large Members

Amy Zurasky

Staff Consultants:

Sue Clark	Director, Special Programs
Barbara Platt	Supervisor, Special Education
Wendy Martin-Johnson	Supervisor, High School Special Education
Dianne Hill	Elementary Teacher Special Education - <b>Secretary</b>
Shanon McQuown	Paraprofessional and Special Education Advocate
Dana Reinboldt	School Board Member Liaison

# **SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE (SEAC) STAFFORD COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

## **2005-2006 ANNUAL REPORT**

### **PART I: MISSION AND STRUCTURE**

#### **MISSION**

The Stafford County Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) is organized and functions in accordance with the mandate in the regulations governing Special Education Programs in Virginia, as defined by the Virginia Department of Education. The committee's functions include the following:

- Advise the local school division of unmet needs in the education of students with special needs;
- Assist the local school division in the formulation and development of plans for improving performance of students with special needs in the public schools and community;
- Participate in the development of priorities and strategies for meeting the identified needs of students with special needs;
- Submit periodic reports and recommendations regarding the education of students with special needs to the superintendent for transmission to the School Board;
- Assist the local school division in interpreting to the community, plans for meeting the needs of students with special needs for educational services; and
- Review policies and procedures for the provision of special education and related services (i.e., Annual Special Education Plan and Application for Federal Funds) prior to submission to the School Board and to the Virginia Department of Education.

#### **MEMBERSHIP**

The committee is composed of stakeholder groups in accordance with the Virginia Department of Education Special Education Regulations. These individuals have a common interest in meeting the educational needs of students with special needs throughout the county. The contributors to the SEAC include seven (7) parents of students with special needs and six (6) staff members. Consultants to the SEAC include the Director of Special Programs, Special Education Supervisors, a Special Educator, a Paraprofessional who is also a Special Education Advocate and published author, and Stafford County Parent Resource Center (PRC) staff. Of the current twelve (12) SEAC contributors, five (5) members have previously served on the SEAC. Two (2) members vacated their appointments this school year. Dana Reinboldt served as Liaison to the School Board. The Office of Special Education provided technical and clerical assistance to the SEAC.

#### **OF SPECIAL NOTE**

This year the Virginia Department of Education sponsored an "Effectiveness Training for Special Education Advisory Committees." This training focused on the following key areas:

- 1) Regulation, Roles and Responsibilities
- 2) SEACs Organizing to do Business and Doing Business
- 3) SEAC Collaboration with School Divisions
- 4) SEACs as Change Agents

The Manassas session was attended by Sue Clark, Wendy Martin-Johnson and Shanon McQuown from the administration, Brian Alden from the Garrisonville District and Tom Quintero from the George Washington District. Mark Howard from the Falmouth District attended the Richmond session.

## **ORGANIZATION**

The activities of the committee were governed by its by-laws. The SEAC year runs from the 1st of August to the 30th of June. Two (2) subcommittees were composed to alleviate the work of the full committee. Staff members from the Office of Special Education were available to assist in any subcommittee with technical assistance, clarification of Stafford County and Virginia Department of Education procedures and background information and, provided ideas and input. Committee members volunteered and were assigned to one of the subcommittees to take advantage of each member's expertise, interests and concerns.

- I. Administrative
- II. Outreach – Child Find

## **MEETINGS**

The committee met on a monthly basis throughout the 2005-2006 school year. One (1) meeting was rescheduled for the following week due to inclement weather. The committee met eight (8) times since the organizational meeting in October and there is one (1) meeting scheduled for the remainder of the school year. All meetings were open to the public, and a public comment period was held at every other SEAC meeting. Those meetings open for public comment served as an information gathering session for SEAC members and as a forum for parental concerns. The SEAC welcomes public input during the public comment period. Member comments were also solicited, which allowed time for members to present information or share knowledge that they may have acquired after the previous meeting. It also provided an opportunity for members to present their opinions on relevant subject matters of interest or concern.

The Special Education Staff, the Parent Resource Center (PRC), and the DisAbility Resource Center (DRC) also made monthly announcements regarding significant events of interest related to students with special needs that (1) have occurred or (2) may occur in the future.

## **PART II: DATA COLLECTION / UNMET NEEDS ASSESSMENTS**

During the 2005-2006 school year, the SEAC continued its role as a steering committee for the Stafford County community. The main functions of the SEAC are to “Advise the local school division of unmet needs in the education of students with special needs;” and to “submit periodic reports and recommendations regarding the education of students with special needs to the superintendent for transmission to the School Board.” With that in mind the SEAC used 4 methods of data collection to determine our unmet needs assessments.

Our methods were:

- 1) SEAC members conducted focus groups within the schools to gather information from Special Education Teachers, Inclusion Teachers, Paraprofessionals and Parents.
- 2) The SEAC reviewed a survey of parents that was completed during the previous year by the PRC
- 3) The SEAC reviewed the information from call logs that are tracked by the PRC. These logs detail what both parents and educators call on the PRC for during the year.

- 4) Public comments at our meetings.

### **PART III: OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **UNMET NEED #1**

The SEAC conducted several school visits and surveyed Special Education staff, inclusive teachers, and Special Education paraprofessionals and the most frequent request was for more focused training for General Ed Teachers who have inclusive classes and Special Education Paraprofessionals.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

The SEAC found that providing Inclusive teachers and paraprofessionals that are responsible for delivering special education services with focused training will significantly improve the education of the students served under Individual Education Plans. The focus areas for paraprofessionals and Inclusive teachers should include specific orientation and strategies for specific disabilities they will encounter and accommodation and modification strategies and techniques.

Additionally the SEAC believes that the county should include experienced parents in the training so Inclusion teachers and paraprofessionals understand the concerns of parents and learn how to effectively communicate with them.

Also a standardized and stream-lined training program that leads to a certification that is documented in the teacher's or paraprofessional's personnel file is important so the county can quickly identify personnel who are trained to serve effectively as Inclusion/ Collaborative teachers and or deliver special education services. A certification program should include incentives (awards, stipend etc.)

Suggestions for implementing this recommendation could include the creation of an Inclusion Specialist whose job responsibilities would include professional development, training and best practices, and classroom coaching and follow-up.

Additionally this recommendation and solution links directly to School Board Goal #1 which is to "Provide educational excellence through instruction that establishes high expectations for ALL students yet recognizes the unique needs of each learner."

#### **UNMET NEED #2**

The SEAC concludes, based in part from school visits, that early identification of students that qualify for special education services is essential for proper staffing, scheduling and for reducing the administrative burden during school days. Early identification includes children entering the school system for the first time and those transferring in from other districts. A significant administrative burden exists at the school level during the first weeks of school that disrupt schedules, require special education staff to leave the classroom and administer to incoming students that require screening, evaluation and placement.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

The SEAC recommends the county conduct centralized screening and initial placement before the school year begins to determine the personnel requirements, case load and gain an understanding and anticipate the number of students receiving services the district will have and the case load distribution.

Additionally this centralized screening will give NEW parents to the district a place to go before school starts to receive information concerning the special education services available and meet key personnel. The goal is to reduce the administrative load on school staff during the first weeks and months of the school year, allow administrators, armed with a better understanding of the number of students they will be serving and the services and accommodations they must provide. This recommendation does not take away the school-based responsibility for identifying and administering to students requiring services as they arrive but will allow administrators and teachers to plan ahead and establish classroom schedules in advance of the school year beginning. Centralized screening, some testing, IEP review, and communication with parents at a central point before school starts can facilitate timely testing, evaluation, improve the initial impression NEW parents have about the school district and give the administration early data from which to plan and distribute resources. The adoption of a centralized program before school begins can make better use of the Education Evaluators who are constantly taken away from classrooms to administer tests and attend IEP meetings.

Additionally this recommendation and solution links directly to School Board Goal #4 which is to "Address the impact of continuing population growth by developing plans to address expanding staff, facilities, transportation, attendance zones, and instruction."

### **UNMET NEED #3**

During one of our meetings this year, almost the entire discussion focused around transitioning of students from elementary to middle school and then off to high school. From the information gathered during the discussion parents feel a sense of uncertainty as their students progress from elementary, to middle and then from middle to high school.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

The SEAC recommends that the school division develop a transition plan that addresses both the needs of the students and the questions of the parents as the students transition from level to level. This information should be delivered not only in written format at transition IEPs but through student and / or parent workshops as well. Ideally this plan would include a standardized checklist developed by administrators, educators and parents. Additionally students who receive ESY services, should be given the option of receiving their services in the new school they would be transitioning to prior to starting out the school year in the fall. For example a student moving from 5<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> would receive their ESY services in the school where they would begin 6<sup>th</sup>. This same concept would hold true for students transitioning from 8<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup>.

### **UNMET NEED #4**

The SEAC concludes that communications with parents of students with special needs should be improved. While individual communications by teachers to parents is not at issue the collective communication from the district to parents is not producing the involvement and networking of parents of special education students. This is evident from the very low public participation in SEAC meetings, low turn out rates for Parent Resource Center events and from focus group information that indicates that parents of students with special needs are an untapped resource.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The SEAC recommends that the district adopt a policy that encourages parents of students with special needs to network, participate in SEAC and form school-based groups to facilitate effective communication, identify unmet needs and advocate for resources the district needs to deliver special education services. To encourage participation the district should adopt a policy that requires school administrators to facilitate the formation of parent groups at the school level. Administrators at schools that provide special education services should advertise, hold an introductory meeting in the evening or at an appropriate time for the parents of students to come together. Administrators can use this introductory meeting to provide information, allow SEAC to attend and inform parents about the SEAC gain an understanding of the concerns parents have. The administration should also provide parents with an opportunity to provide their name, email address, address and telephone number to the SEAC so future events, special information, surveys and focus groups can be easily organized to facilitate the identification of unmet needs. This forum, at the school level can improve parent networking, increase information sharing, provide a method of administrators to update parents, and provide a means for SEAC recruitment.

This recommendation and solution links directly to School Board Goal #3 and #5 which is to “Encourage parents and the community to increase their interest and involvement in our schools,” and “Provide facilities that promote student learning and community support.”

## **UNMET NEED #5**

The SEAC concludes, in part from the results of school visits, that the Special Education and Inclusion classrooms need additional resources to better address the needs of students receiving special education services.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Resources to include multiple grade level content resources in social studies, science and language arts, math manipulatives, as well as visual aids oriented on content area are all in high demand. We recommend the School Board form a focus group responsible to the School Board to survey the resource needs of Inclusion teachers and special education staff and develop a plan to address the critical resource needs and a multi-year plan to address the recurring and systemic resource issues.

This recommendation and solution links directly to School Board Goal #2 to “Integrate technology in support of all instruction.”

## **PART IV: SPECIAL THANKS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Many community members within Stafford County have contributed time and effort to the Stafford County Office of Special Education, students with special needs and to the families with special needs students. The SEAC would like to formally acknowledge the following individual(s) or organizations:

1. Joyce Resh and Rebecca Leggit of the Stafford County Parent Resource Center. Not only do they provide a valuable and ongoing resource for countless parents and families, but they also organized and presented several workshops during the school year. Their hard work, professionalism, and dedication are very much appreciated!

2. Our special thanks go to Susan Clark, Wendy Martin-Johnson, and Barbara Platt from the Office of Special Education, not only for the many hours they spent assisting, supporting and advising us, but also for their dedication to the students with special needs in our county. We, and our students, offer our heartfelt appreciation.

3. Many thanks to the many parents who came to our meetings to offer their input and/or advice.